COMIX WAVE

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BENNY'S SHORT STORY

The first time I saw Benny he was charcoal broiling cheeseburgers in a coffee shop in Fresno, California. He had heard about me from some of the students who hung out at his place, so he talked to me about what was going on, which was a lot of drugs and rock music at that time. Buried in the valley, Fresno managed to get a lot of fall out from the Bay Area on one side and Los Angeles on the other. The students at the college were mostly locals, but a great many had been sent there against their will by parents who were afraid of all the strange things they saw in progress in the cities, things like Be-ins and love-ins, kids dropping out of school and taking acid, growing their hair long, looking with distrust upon anyone over thirty. Fresno State was little more than an advanced high school during the time I taught there. There were a handful of students in open revolt, but most were trying to get into the same sororities and fraternities their parents had belonged to. Benny's coffeehouse was a hang out for folk singers and poets. It was the place to pick someone up for a quickie in those pre-AIDS days when *the pill* had freed everyone from the fear of pregnancy and unwanted early marriage.

Benny was a college man. He had a wife and two children and a house and the coffee shop. He wanted to write and he talked a lot about writing as did most of the folks who graduate from English departments and find themselves in other lines of work. I liked him. Always got in a few words with him when I was there to read poetry or do a play or just have a snack. I missed him when I left Fresno and moved on to Sonoma State.

It wasn't until after I had quit teaching and was freelancing for various papers and magazines that I ran into Benny again. I was working free for John Bryan who had started the San Francisco PHOENIX, publishing a lot of reviews and things. That may sound strange, but a lot of us did that sort of thing for a reason. The role gave us access to a lot of scenes. We got into everything free. We got comp copies of books and records and we were invited to the promo parties thrown by Warner's and Fantasy and many of the other outfits that were farming musicians in the Bay Area during those years. At the parties there were lots of girls and, more important to many of us, all the food we wanted to eat. So we got paid pretty well for knocking out those columns of hype for Bryan and Max Scheer and Art Kunkin. Still, the guys on the regular dailies got the same *and they got paid well, too.* So we still did our share of complaining. I got $20 an article from the LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS and I learned that Art bought his wife, Valeria, a new Mercedes, then when she totalled it, he bought her another one! Well, he could afford perks like that because guys like me were filling the paper with writing and taking peanuts for the legwork. We weren't happy when we found out about the money coming in through the ad departments of those papers and we were disillusioned when there was never any mention of a raise in pay for the writers or the artists.

This is not a story about all of that shit, just some background so you will understand what happened when I suggested to Benny that he give one of his stories to John Bryan for the PHOENIX. Benny, when I met him again, was cooking at a restaurant in Berkeley. I went in there to have some eggs one morning and there he was. He sat down and we reminisced about the Fresno days and he told me he had split with his wife and kids and was now married to an artist and living in Berkeley. She was about 19. Benny was closing in on forty. He was still writing, however, and he told me some of his stories and I told him about the PHOENIX and my drama reviews, etc. Benny didn't have a publisher, of course. Who ever had one of those? He wanted to see his name in print. I knew that. Once you get used to it, you have to keep on. I've been in print for nearly 20 years now. It's a habit you can't break without feeling death closing in. To be is to be in print. Well, I told Benny I would be happy to give one of his stories to Bryan for possible use in an issue of the PHOENIX and after some chit chat I did. I did not realize what the cost would be.

You understand, I had been in the business for a long time and was used to having my copy cut to fit a publisher's space. I knew how pop writing worked and I was no longer upset if I found a line changed here and there. When I started, I was just like Benny. Those were my fucking words and they were holy and how dare anyone change them! What did an editor know? Well, I've been an editor myself now and I've changed or shortened here and there to fit space and I know both sides and I am no longer that hard to deal with. I now think of the pop stuff as copy and if a word is changed here or there, so what? The meaning is usually retained.

John Bryan *always* changed things to suit himself. He would rewrite the same way he had when he was working for a straight paper, so I should have known Benny's story would come out in print sounding more like Bryan than Benny, but *Benny* didn't know that and when he saw the printed piece he was devastated, destroyed. It was like the guy's life's blood had been spilled right there in the restaurant. Now Bryan wasn't there to see any of that agony. He was over at his house thinking about the next issue and as far as he was concerned he had done *Benny* a favor by getting his name in print for the first time and he had done *me* a favor because Benny was a pal of mine. Sitting in the restaurant in front of a Benny red-faced with anger, all of it directed at me, I had one of those

COMIX PLUGOLA

EL VIBORA 110, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.* David Nadel's NEANDERTHAL TIMES 1 is 50¢/st from Comix Wave, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

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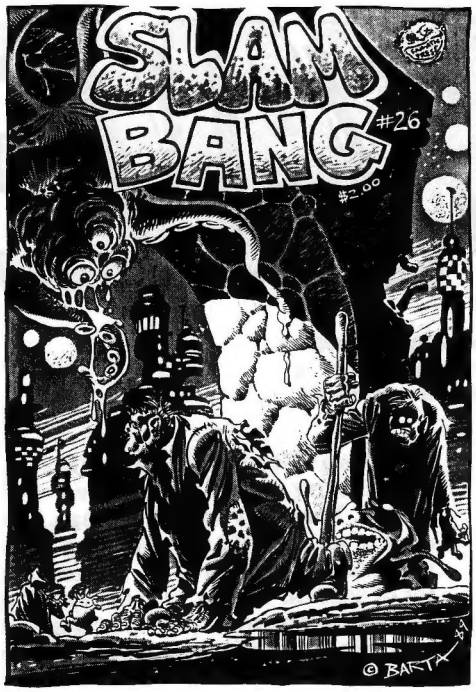
epiphanic moments James Joyce talked about. I had made a mistake. Benny was a cherry and I had sold him out to Genghis Khan. To me, his story was basically the same. Actually, John was a pro and he had improved some of it, made it less sentimental and emotional, which Benny would realize some years later when *he* had more experience, but at that moment I had to deal with a man who felt Bryan and I had fucked him royally and made him a laughingstock in front of all his friends.

I had lost a friend recently refound and I had to change restaurants.

I never saw Benny again. I think I mentioned the whole thing casually to John Bryan, but it really didn't mean any more to me than it did to him. When you are putting out a weekly, you are already into the next week before this one's issue gets back from the printer. We were into another issue and the Film Festival or something was going on so there wasn't time to worry about Benny's story. At the time, I probably told Benny that I didn't have anything to do with editing his story, so why was he coming on so strong with me, why didn't he just call Bryan up and lay all that shit on him? I don't remember the details, just the outcome. I had tried to do a favor for a friend and it had not worked out. Maybe it was partly my fault, but I don't really think it was. I think Benny was just an idealist as many academic writers are and when he was forced to confront the real world of print, he couldn't handle it. As the years went by, I became more and more detached from my own writing and these days I seldom see it printed. I just put the checks in the bank and go on to the next idea. When I want my own words preserved I put them in this newsletter.

You want to say it your way, you have to pay the printer. -Clay Geerdes

ACID MAN SOCIETY#8



SLAM BANG!

Allen Freeman's SLAM BANG continues. #26 has a nice cover by Hilary Barta and internal material by John Howard, Morgan Lloyd, Scott Nickel, Jim Burke, and others. $2.75 pp gets you a copy. Ask for Allen's list of publications.

ADVICE TO THE LOVELORN

Two two rich Midwestern yentas who hide behind the names of Ann Landers and Dear Abby are actually the twin daughters of a Russian Jewish immigrant named Abraham Friedman. Pauline Esther "Popo" Friedman Phillips and Esther Pauline "Eppie" Friedman Lederer grew up on Jackson Street in Sioux City, Iowa, my own home town. Both attended Morningside College, but dropped out when they married. You can read the story of their lives in DEAR ANN, DEAR ABBY by Jan Pottker and Bob Speziale (New York: Dodd Mead, 1987).

Eppie got into the advice business first when she took over the Ann Landers column for the Chicago SUN-TIMES in October of 1955 shortly after the death of Ruth Crowley. The column, consisting mostly of advice to the lovelorn, originated in 1942, and was trademarked by the SUN-TIMES on October 8, 1946. Ann Landers was a fictitious name, and Eppie didn't own it until the newspaper gave it to her in 1965. Popo on the other hand, copying her sister's lead, sold her advice column to the San Francisco CHRONICLE and registerred DEAR ABBY as her trademark. The first column ran on January 9, 1956. Born July 4, 1918, the popcult twins will be 71 this summer.

COMIX PLUGOLA

From Randy H. Crawford, UG THE BARBARIAN 3. 50¢ pp. 911 Park St. SW. Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241. Crawford pokes fun at the og comics in a mini-way. Ask for Randy's list of mini-comix.* EL VIBORA 109, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.* Scott Stevens has two new ones. V. D. CAGE 8 ($1 pp) and HEAVEN IS DEEP, MR. FIX (75¢ pp). 8220 Research Blvd., #114-B, Austin, TX 78758. * LES POIRES is 50¢/stamp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Harvard Square Sta, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Robert Pasternak returns to CW with ACID MAN SOCIETY 8. 50¢/st from Comix Wave, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Looks like Gary Trudeau has finally succumbed to the Crumbic influence. Mr. Butts lineage certainly goes back to the halycon days of Tommy Toilet. To my knowledge, Gary's reference to ZAP COMIX in the April 22 DOONESBURY strip marks the first time ZAP has been a referent in a daily strip. Hey, it only took 22 years, huh? Origin of ZAP. It was the sound made by a Buck Rogers Disintegrator Pistol (see a 1934 ad).

Saw those bondage panels from X-MEN on the news on tv last night. Pretty cheesy stuff for the vidfreak and whopper gang, but, fact is, most of the people I used to sell X-MEN to when I worked at a comic store were old enough for ladies in black underwear. Some woman was really upset though and she's taking her case to congress. While she's at it, I wonder if she has ever noticed those Macy's and Emporium underwear ads, but I suspect her peculiar consciousness singles out comic books as the cause of her son's interest in sex. Hey, it's those cereal and soft drink ads on the tube, Mom. That's why all the boys hang out in grocery stores these days.

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